

## **Assembly Bill No. 494**

### **CHAPTER 784**

An act to amend Section 2053.1 of the Penal Code, relating to prisoners.

[Approved by Governor October 13, 2013. Filed with  
Secretary of State October 13, 2013.]

#### **LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST**

AB 494, V. Manuel Pérez. Prisoners: literacy and education.

Existing law requires the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to implement in every state prison literacy programs that are designed to ensure that, upon parole, inmates are able to achieve a 9th grade reading level. Existing law further requires the department to prepare an implementation plan for the literacy programs and to request sufficient funds to make the programs available to a certain percentage of inmates by specified dates.

This bill would instead require the department to implement literacy programs that are designed to ensure that upon parole inmates are able to achieve the goals specified in this bill. This bill would require the department to prepare an implementation plan and request sufficient funds to, among other things, offer academic programming throughout an inmate's incarceration that focuses on increasing the reading ability of an inmate to at least a 9th grade level and, for an inmate reading at a 9th grade level or higher, focus on helping the inmate obtain a general education development certificate, or its equivalent, or high school diploma. This bill would also make technical, nonsubstantive changes to these provisions.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(a) In 2012, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation released its plan, "The Future of California Corrections: A Blueprint to Save Billions of Dollars, End Federal Oversight, and Improve the Prison System."

(b) The plan states that its mission is to improve access to rehabilitation programs, which includes access to academic programs, including literacy programs. The goal, according to the plan, is to place 70 percent of the department's target population in programs consistent with the academic and rehabilitative needs of the prison population. The plan states that increasing access to rehabilitative programs will reduce recidivism by better preparing inmates to be productive members of society. In doing so, the plan will help lower the long-term prison population and save the state money.

(c) Senate Bill 949 of the 1989–90 Regular Session (Chapter 989 of the Statutes of 1989), regarding literacy standards in the state prison system, is in conflict with the plan that is now in place by the department. It is the intent of the Legislature to bring the statute in line with the department's new policy.

SEC. 2. Section 2053.1 of the Penal Code is amended to read:

2053.1. (a) The Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation shall implement in every state prison literacy programs that are designed to ensure that upon parole inmates are able to achieve the goals contained in this section. The department shall prepare an implementation plan for this program, and shall request the necessary funds to implement this program as follows:

(1) The department shall offer academic programming throughout an inmate's incarceration that shall focus on increasing the reading ability of an inmate to at least a 9th grade level.

(2) For an inmate reading at a 9th grade level or higher, the department shall focus on helping the inmate obtain a general education development certificate or its equivalent or high school diploma.

(3) The department shall offer college programs through voluntary education programs or equivalent programs.

(4) While the department shall offer education to target populations, priority shall be given to those with a criminogenic need for education, those who have a need based on their educational achievement level, or other factors as determined by the department.

(b) In complying with the requirements of this section, the department shall give strong consideration to computer-assisted training and other innovations that have proven to be effective in reducing illiteracy among disadvantaged adults.